

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 521

EC 180 257

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 TITLE From Institution to Community Residence: Assessing Environments for Retarded People.
 PUB DATE Aug 84
 NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychiatric Association (92nd, Toronto, Canada, August 24-28, 1985).
 PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Adults; Deinstitutionalization (of Disabled); *Evaluation Methods; *Group Homes; *Mental Retardation; *Program Evaluation; *Residential Programs; Theories

ABSTRACT

Four comprehensive approaches to assessing living environments for retarded persons are described. The Residential Management Survey (by McLain, Silverstein, Hubell, and Brownlee) is an approach to evaluating whether a facility is either resident-oriented or institution-oriented. An ecological approach to group behavior (by Landesman-Dwyer) is described, followed by the normalizing philosophy of the Program Analysis of Service Systems (by Wolfensberger and Glenn). The Multiphasic Environmental Assessment Procedure (by Moos and Lemke) features an environmental theory which considers both physical and social forces operating within a setting. Comparisons of the four approaches are made for administration time, components of the environment measured, and theoretical bases.
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From Institution to Community Residence:
Assessing Environments for Retarded People

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With the rapid expansion of community living alternatives for retarded individuals has come a multitude of research studies investigating specific components of living environments. In order to understand these components of environment and how they differ among heterogenous settings, researchers from the mental retardation field as well as investigators from environmental and ecological psychology have set forth frameworks for assessing living environments for retarded citizens. This paper describes four frameworks which have been formulated to assess environments. Similarities and differences among the frameworks in both practical and theoretical terms are discussed.

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Community-based facilities for mentally retarded citizens have multiplied rapidly in recent years. These facilities include diverse settings where from one to over 100 residents may live in boarding homes or apartments or converted single-family residences. Given the considerable number of institutions still operating, the picture of living environments for retarded persons is anything but homogenous.

Because of this tremendous diversity, a means of describing and evaluating these settings on comparable criteria is desirable. Past and current researchers have investigated a myriad of variables falling under the rubric of "environment." A partial listing of these variables include: group home size, group home cost effectiveness, staff turnover rates, activities of residents, staff attitudes toward their work, and observation of staff-resident interactions. These investigations have been conducted with varying levels of reliability, validity, and sophistication. In contrast to the studies of isolated variables, other researchers have begun to develop more comprehensive assessment strategies.

Four such approaches to assessing living environments for retarded persons will be described. A comparison of the approaches focusing on practical concerns for the practitioner and on theoretical perspectives will follow.

Environmental Assessment Frameworks

1. The Residential Management Survey (RMS) by McLain, Silverstein, Hubbell, and Brownlee (of the UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute) was designed to provide an index of the extent to which a facility is either resident-oriented or institution-oriented. It is one of several modifications of the Child Management Scale developed by the English researchers King, Raynes, and Tizard. A 23-item questionnaire, the RMS is administered to staff members and contains items relating to management practices and resident activities and possessions.

In terms of its psychometric characteristics, the UCLA group has done surprisingly little work in establishing the reliability of the instrument. Their 1975 study, which introduced the RMS, included data on the stability of questionnaire responses of ward staff over an eight month period. The resulting correlation of the two administrations was an encouraging .90, however, more comprehensive reliability data is desirable. McLain and his colleagues have reported several validity studies. In the first of these studies

(1975) the RMS scores were closely related to stated program goals for different wards within the same residential institution. In the second study (1977) the RMS scores accounted for more variation in residents' adaptive behavior changes over 2-3 years than did a formula devised to measure implementation of specific programming (e.g. behavior modification or sensori-motor training) in residential institutions and community living facilities. Studies by other researchers using the RMS have been relatively few.

2. From the ecological tradition of researchers such as Roger Barker and Robert Edgerton comes the strategy used by Landesman-Dwyer, Stein, and Sackett. Their goal was "to provide some basic descriptive data about the daily lives of retarded children and adults in a variety of community settings. Instead of hypothesizing relationships between certain environmental features and behaviors, this group aimed to delineate the "ecology" of group behavior of retarded individuals.

To accomplish this, Landesman-Dwyer selected 20 group homes in Washington state for study and devised the Home Observation Code (HOC) as a way to describe the behavior of the residents. This coding system contains 10 observational categories. After 16,000 hours of observation, the research

team arrived at behavioral profiles for each of the 20 residences. These profiles reflect the activities in which residents were engaged, and the proportion of time spent in each behavioral category.

The general findings were that age and level of retardation were related to the proportion of time spent in specific activities. A replication to establish reliability over time was planned for three of the residences, but no inter-rater reliabilities were reported in the 1978 data. Although direct observation is presumed to be a valid representation of activity, the authors suggest further validity studies where group homes would be compared to "control groups" similar in features such as size (communes) and ability levels (elderly persons).

3. The normalizing impact of environments and programs is the underlying philosophy of the Program Analysis of Service Systems (PASS 3) developed by Wolfensberger and Glenn. The principle of normalization has been a prominent force in shaping services for mentally retarded and other persons who have been devalued by society. In simplest terms, normalization means developing the competencies and enhancing the image of such individuals so they may live as valued (i.e. as "normal") a life as possible.

A quantitative scoring system is utilized by a team of PASS raters who perform individual ratings on 50 issues, and then reconcile their opinions to come to consensus on final scores. Covered are issues such as age-appropriate programs and structures, developmental growth orientation, quality of the physical setting, and integration into the community. Internal consistencies and item correlations from the earlier versions of PASS 1 and 2 are reported in the Handbook. A 1980 factor analysis done by Demaine, Silverstein, and Mayeda validated the impact of the normalization construct in the resulting six factors.

Although PASS 3 was designed to evaluate any type of human service system with respect to compliance with normalization principles, it has been frequently used to assess residential facilities for retarded citizens. Several states (Nebraska, Pennsylvania, California and Canada) have adopted PASS as an evaluation tool for state-operated living facilities and programs for retarded individuals.

4. Rudolf Moos has long been involved in what he terms "socialecological" systems; an environmental theory which considers both the physical and social forces operating within a setting, and how the individuals in the setting interact with such forces. Recently Moos, with Sonne Lemke, had designed the Multiphasic Environmental Assessment

Procedure (MEAP), which is an instrument for evaluating sheltered living settings. The MEAP assesses four major domains of the environment: the physical setting, organizational factors, the characteristics of people in the setting (called the human aggregate), and the social climate (the views of participants in the setting toward the setting).

Information for the MEAP is gathered by staff interviews, a tour of the facility, staff and resident completion of the social climate scale, and the evaluator's subjective ratings of the quality of physical and social variables. Although the MEAP has been developed and normed on living environments for elderly people, Moos contends that there are enough common features shared by sheltered living settings for both elderly and retarded persons that the MEAP can be used in many of the community care and institutional facilities where retarded persons reside.

In the present study, the MEAP was utilized to describe six community residence environments. The resulting profiles did differentiate the homes on several relevant features (policies, functional level of residents), but many items and scoring procedures were biased towards institutional settings. Another disturbing, but not surprising, finding was that many residents could not respond reliably to

the social climate interview, a construct that plays heavily in Moos' environmental schema.

Comparisons of Environmental Frameworks

The four frameworks which have been presented differ in their origins, scope, and methods, yet all have targeted some similar components of environments for retarded persons. First let us compare the practical aspects of using each of the assessment tools. Table 1 presents the pertinent features that would concern the practitioner in assessing a community residence for eight retarded adults. The time involved ranges from one hour for staff members to complete the RMS up to the 320 hours involved in using the in-depth Home Observation Code. Of course, the resulting environmental descriptions also vary in depth and scope according to the time spent in assessment and the variety of information sources utilized. The RMS yields the briefest data, a single score, while the MEAP produces a numerical profile for each of its five subscales. Both the HOC and PASS 3 result in written reports detailing their findings.

It is also important to compare the frameworks in terms of the components of environment that they measure. Hiltonsmith and Keller (1983) have outlined a model for organizing setting assessment data. Their model separates

settings into the broad components of appearance, operation, and opportunities, and then suggests that practitioners can pick and choose among formal and informal strategies to assess the settings of interest. In Table 2 this model is shown as a components assessed by the four environmental instruments described in this paper.

The emphasis of certain components reflects the theoretical bases of the authors. As can be seen, the RMS, which was designed to be an index of management style, focuses on setting operations and opportunities. The HOC also stresses variables in these areas as reflective of the ecology of group homes, but utilizes appearance components as a backdrop for behaviors.

Both the MEAP and PASS include all the components in the Hiltonsmith and Keller model, yet these frameworks remain distinctly different. Moos is working from an environmental theory which he has expanded beyond the social climate notion to include other environmental forces. The MEAP represents the application of this broader theory to sheltered settings, and Moos and others (notably Wandersman) have offered this as a tool for assessing mental retardation settings, but have used the MEAP solely in geriatric settings. Preliminary research suggests that the MEAP does not emphasize

variables that are important in mental retardation settings (e.g. skill development).

In contrast, Wolfensberger has taken the philosophical principle of normalization and sought out the influence of this ideal in a human service or living setting. Evaluators are asked to rate the quality, along a set of stringent criteria, of the setting in terms of its normalizing impact on the service recipients. Therefore, the resulting description is not of the environment per se, but of the normalizing influence of the environment.

Given the variety of settings in which mentally retarded citizens live, it is encouraging to see progress being made in assessing the tremendous impact of these settings. Such progress will assist parents, social workers, and psychologists in developing settings where these citizens are supported and encouraged to live rich and fulfilling lives.

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Table 1

Comparison of Selected Environmental Assessment Instruments

Instrument	Authors	Price	Time		Resulting Data
			Involved	Format	
Residential Management Survey (RMS)	McLain et. al. (1975)	single copy free	under one hour	Questionnaire completed by staff members	Management Orientation Score: Institution v. Client-Oriented
Multiphasic Environ- mental Assessment Procedure (MEAP)	Moos & Lemke (1979)	\$12.00 for question- naire & manual	12 hours for 8- resident group home	Directors Interview, Staff & Resident Questionnaires, Tour & Observation	Facility Profiles in four Domains of Environment & Rating Scale

Table 1 continued

Comparison of Selected Environmental Assessment Instruments

Instrument	Authors	Price	Time		Resulting Data
			Involved	Format	
Program	Wolfen-	\$13.50	Min. 50	Staff interviews,	Program Quality
Analysis	sberger	for man-	hours per	Tour, Observation,	Index and
of Service	& Glenn	uals plus	member,	Document Review	Written Report
Systems	(1975)	min. \$100	3-5 person		
(PASS)		workshop	team		
Home	Landes-	Single copy	320 hours	Direct Observation,	Descriptive profile
Observa-	man-	free	8-resident	Staff interviews	of resident
vation	Dwyer		group home		activities and
Code	et. al.				setting resources
(HOC)	(1976)				

Table 2

Setting Components Assessed by Selected Environmental
Instruments

Appearance	RMS	HOC	PASS	MEAP
Physical		X	X	X
Ambient			X	X
Contents		X	X	X

Operation	RMS	HOC	PASS	MEAP
Organization	X		X	X
Communication	X	X	X	X
Usage		X	X	X

Opportunities				
Nurturance	X		X	X
Cognitive Stimulation	X	X	X	X
Social/Emotional Stimulation	X	X	X	X

Note. Adapted from Hiltonsmith & Keller, 1983.

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